

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call on this House to pass a new investment in character education. As the former superintendent of my State schools, I know firsthand that character education can make a difference in teaching our children values and to make sure our children are well rounded and prepared to become good citizens.

Across my Congressional District, school leaders have developed character education initiatives that can make a difference in strong schools and better communities. In Wake County, North Carolina, they have become a leader through an innovative effort called "Uniting for Character." In Johnston County, the principal of Selma Elementary School attributes 59 fewer suspensions between the '95 and '96 school years due to their character education program. And CBS News recently profiled a successful character education program in the Nash-Rocky Mount school system.

Mr. Speaker, character education works because it teaches our children to see the world through a moral lens. Children learn that actions have consequences. Teachers work with parents and the entire community to instill the spirit of shared responsibility. Character education emphasizes values such as character, good judgment, integrity, kindness, perseverance, respect, and self-discipline. This Congress needs to act on this and act now.

A NATION'S TAX POLICY REFLECTS ITS VALUES

(Mr. HEFLEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HEFLEY. Mr. Speaker, one reason why taxes are such an important issue is because a Nation's tax policy reflects its values. A system of low taxes rewards hard work, rewards educational achievement, rewards prudence, rewards long-term planning, rewards risk-taking, rewards entrepreneurship, rewards diligence, and most of all, is an endorsement of freedom, the idea that a person is truly entitled to the fruits of his labor.

A system of high taxation punishes these very same virtues. It discourages work, discourages job creation, and reduces freedom. It buys into the idea that the more productive a person is, the more he should be punished, and the less entitled he is to those fruits. It is based on the belief that government knows best.

This in my view is a bizarre value system. I find the liberal value system to be contrary to freedom, contrary to common sense, and the exact opposite of the values that made America great.

WHAT HAS THE HOUSE DONE TO MAKE AMERICA'S CHILDREN SAFER FROM GUN VIOLENCE?

(Mr. WEINER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WEINER. Mr. Speaker, it has been a month since the tragedy at Columbine. The Senate quickly acted to make children safer. But what has this House done? What has this leadership done? Have we closed the gun show loophole? Today we will get the answer: No. Are we going to hold parents responsible for securing their weapons to keep them out of the hands of children? Today we are going to find out that the answer is no. Are we going to do anything to invest in smart gun technology, so only people who own the guns can fire the guns? Today we are going to find out that under this leadership, the answer is no.

Instead, we are going to be doing the bidding of the National Rifle Association. But the Republicans have come up with a bill today, and among their brilliant strokes, they are going to require that every record store have the lyrics to every CD on display at every store.

If Members want to know what it was that Pavarotti was singing, now they will know. But if they want to make our kids safer, they will have to wait until the Democrats take back the House.

DEMOCRATS ARE CONSISTENT: THEY ALL WANT HIGHER TAXES

(Mr. KNOLLENBERG asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. Mr. Speaker, not counting the social security, the Congressional Budget Office projects \$824 billion in budget surpluses over the next 10 years. Again, that is not counting the temporary surplus in the social security trust fund.

What does the Democratic leadership intend to do with these surpluses? Well, the President stated last January that he does not trust Americans to "spend it right." Yes, that is an exact quote.

Earlier this month we had the House Minority Leader, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), state for the record twice that he would consider raising taxes to pay for an expansion in Federal programs. Members heard that right, raise taxes, not cut them.

Now we have the minority leader in the other body, Mr. DASCHLE, who is on record with this exchange on CNN's Evans and Novak. Asked his opinion about raising taxes, Mr. DASCHLE said, "It's an option. Of course, it's on the table. . . ."

Think about that. At least the Democratic leadership is consistent. They all want higher taxes.

EXPAND THE COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT ACT

(Ms. SCHAKOWSKY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to share an example of how banks and community groups are using the Community Reinvestment Act, an act now under attack, to expand access to the financial mainstream.

Last summer First National Bank of Chicago made an agreement with the Chicago CRA Coalition to invest \$4.1 billion in low- and moderate-income Chicago communities over the next 6 years. The bank recently opened a new full service branch in Dominick's Supermarket in the North Lawndale neighborhood on Chicago's West Side.

First National began pilot projects in North Lawndale and two other branches to expand low-cost checking accounts. At the same time, the bank and community groups sponsored financial literacy workshops for area residents.

In the last few months, dozens of persons who previously would have been denied the opportunity to open a bank account have opened checking and savings accounts, depositing thousands of dollars.

The Community Reinvestment Act is under attack. Why? I do not know the answer to that question, but I know that what we should be doing is protecting, expanding, and strengthening CRA.

RENEWAL WEEK

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, we talk a lot in this body about achieving the American dream, but even in the most prosperous economic expansion in recent history, many of our fellow Americans still struggle to make it out of poverty.

That is why the Renewal Alliance, a bicameral group of legislators here in Congress, seeks to highlight both civic and legislative solutions to the plights of so many low-income Americans who desperately want to make it. They want safe communities and they want honest jobs.

I want to encourage my colleagues to join the many members of the Renewal Alliance this week, Renewal Week, and to renew our efforts to pass legislation critical to improving our low-income communities.

The American Community Renewal Act, the Charity Tax Credit, and education scholarship opportunities all combine to use a market-driven and even private sector approach to bring about real hope and opportunity through tax incentives for investment, for capital formation, for community reinvestment, and for contributing to charities of our choice, as well as opportunity scholarships. We reward what works.

Join us in working for our Nation's low-income communities.